

personal freedom was, in the first instance, brought before the peasant by the commutation of prsedial service for economic reasons ; and but for this occurrence it might, for all we can tell, have slumbered yet another century. But this idea, once awakened, was immediately discovered to be in accordance with the teaching of Christianity. Complete slavery had long been opposed by the Church, but the Abbots and Bishops who held manors all over the country had not yet seen any incompatibility between Christian brotherhood aivd the status of the villein. But the peasantry and their humbler religious pastors saw it for themselves. Besides the levelling and democratic tendencies of the Christian spirit, the belief in a common origin from Adam and Eve, not then shaken or allegorised by scientific criticism, was a very real and valid argument against hereditary serfdom. Indeed it is hard to see how the lords, basing their claims on inheritance only, and not on general utility, could logically escape the difficulty. At any rate the famous catchword,

When Adam delved and Ev£
span Who was then a
gentleman ?

seems to have corresponded in importance and popularity to * Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite.'

Those who stirred up these Christian aspirations towards an ideal of more perfect freedom and equality, were the religious persons who were most directly in touch with the labouring classes. Like some parish priests at the beginning of the French Revolution, many of the poorer English clergy were instigators of rebellion. John Ball, the principal agitator, was a chaplain, and a religious zealot. In the character of prophet he had for twenty years been going round the country. Church and State he alike attacked, but laid most stress on the iniquity of serfage. He had begun his career as a radical long before John Wycliffe was of any great importance in the world of politics and religion. In so far as he had any connection with the reformer, it was not as follower but as precursor. It was said that he adopted, in the last year of his life, Wycliffe's new heresy on the Eucharist. Otherwise he is himself responsible for the good and evil he did. He